10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

21 December 1988

Dear Mr. Azzam

Thank you for your letter of 7 December to the Prime Minister about the violation of religious freedom in the Soviet Union. I have been asked to reply.

As you will know, President Gorbachev's visit has been postponed because of the tragic earthquake in Armenia. We, of course, hope that it will be reinstated soon. I am sure that the Prime Minister will have human rights matters very much in mind when they meet.

Although there have been a number of encouraging signs of progress in Soviet human rights recently, including some relaxation of the stringent restrictions on organised religion, there remains a long way to go. We want to see fundamental and lasting change to allow all Soviet citizens to enjoy the full range of human rights and freedoms, including the right to practise one's religion. We shall continue to press the Soviet government for further reform, including the removal of all religious restrictions.

Yours sincerely,

Charles Powell

C. D. POWELL

Mr. Salem Azzam

المجلس الإسلامي
Islamic Council

7 December 1988

The Rt Hon Mrs Margaret Thatcher
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1

Dear Prime Minister,

After decades of suppression of human rights and religious freedoms in the Soviet Union, there are signs of a welcome change in the attitude of the Soviet authorities, especially after your historic visit to that country. According to media reports, the Soviets have relaxed, even though slightly, the stringent restrictions on organised religion, which have marked the Soviet rule ever since the Bolshevik revolution.

Welcome though this change is, the Soviets have yet to go a long way before they can claim norms of human rights and religious freedoms comparable to those prevailing in the West.

President Michail Gorbachov is scheduled to arrive in Great Britain next week for talks with you. The British Muslims would very much appreciate it if you would take up with President Gorbachov the question of further relaxation of religious restrictions, including those on some sixty million Soviet Muslims. They are encouraged to approach you in view of your high international standing and influence, and your firm stand on human rights.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

Salem Azzam

Salem Azzam
Secretary General

16 Grosvenor Crescent London SW1 7EP Telephone 01-235 9832 Telex 894240 I I